International Journal of Sociology and Political Science
www.sociologyjournal.in
Online ISSN: 2664-7745, Print ISSN: 2664-7737
Received: 24-08-2025, Accepted: 25-09-2025, Published: 10-10-2025
Volume 7, Issue 4, 2025, Page No. 1-4

Swach Bharat Abhiyan: A sustainable development initiative of India

Akshit Changani
Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Bundelkhand University, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract
Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA), launched on 2 October 2014, is India's flagship national cleanliness campaign aimed at eliminating open defecation, improving solid waste management, and fostering community engagement for sustainable sanitation (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2015 [15]; Gupta, 2016). This study evaluates the socio-environmental impact of SBA through a structured questionnaire administered to 100 respondents across urban and rural settings. Data analysis includes ten frequency tables and bar graphs illustrating awareness, participation, satisfaction, and perceived impacts. Findings indicate high awareness (Table 1), but mixed satisfaction with local sanitation (Table 3) and government support (Table 8). The study contributes empirical insights on SBA's efficacy and suggests strategic interventions to strengthen community participation and infrastructure maintenance.

Keywords: Swachh bharat abhiyan, clean India mission, sanitation, open defecation, solid waste management

Introduction

Since its inception, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has undertaken one of the most ambitious sanitation drives in global history, aiming to catalyze fundamental shifts in public hygiene behaviors while simultaneously scaling up infrastructure provision across India's rural and urban landscapes (Narain, 2015). Drawing on behavioral insights and community mobilization strategies, the program has promoted household ownership of toilet facilities and sought to normalize the practice of using latrines through a combination of mass media campaigns, local champions, and school-based education initiatives (Mall *et al*., 2017) [13]. Central to its rural mandate was the goal of constructing one hundred million individual household latrines within a five-year period, a target that involved coordinating between central funds, state implementation units, and grassroots workers to achieve unprecedented construction rates in remote districts (Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, 2016) [16]. Simultaneously, Swachh Bharat's urban component endeavored to achieve complete municipal waste collection coverage—100 per cent—in cities and towns, thereby addressing the perennial challenge of uncollected refuse and open dumping sites that had long plagued municipal authorities (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The campaign's design was informed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, explicitly aligning with SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation to assure holistic water, sanitation, and hygiene outcomes, as well as SDG 11 on sustainable cities, which foregrounds integrated urban waste management and public health imperatives (UN, 2015; UN Habitat, 2016). Early assessments of the drive indicate marked public health gains, including statistically significant reductions in diarrheal disease incidence among children under five—a decrease attributable to both improved access to sanitation facilities and greater community awareness of hand-washing practices (Kumar *et al*., 2017) [11]. Moreover, empirical evaluations document enhanced capacity of local governance structures, as panchayats and municipal corporations have acquired new tools for monitoring service delivery, enforcing sanitary regulations, and engaging citizen feedback through digital platforms introduced under the campaign (Jain, 2018) [8]. Despite these successes, the program's long-term sustainability faces persistent challenges, notably in embedding durable behavioral change; follow-up studies suggest that in some regions, latrine use declines once initial monitoring subsides, underscoring the need for continuous social reinforcement and adaptable communication strategies (Rao & Menon, 2021) [21].

Additionally, waste segregation at source remains uneven, with many households and commercial establishments reverting to mixed-waste disposal, thereby impeding downstream recycling and composting efforts envisaged under the initiative's circular economy framework (Kapoor & Gupta, 2022) [9]. Further complicating implementation is the fragmentation of responsibilities across multiple agencies—ranging from water boards and health departments to municipal sanitation units—resulting in coordination bottlenecks that delay procurement, hamper real-time data sharing, and limit integrated planning for resource allocation (Chatterjee, 2023) [2]. To address these gaps, experts recommend strengthening institutional linkages through clearly delineated roles, establishing unified command-and-control centers for sanitation, and leveraging geospatial mapping tools for dynamic performance tracking. Such refinements would build on the campaign's considerable achievements by reinforcing both the hardware of infrastructure and the software of sustained community engagement, thereby ensuring that Swachh Bharat Bahaman's vision of a "Clean India" is not only realized in measurable outputs but also institutionalized in everyday practices and governance norms.

Literature Review

A systematic review of key studies conducted between 2009 and 2025 reveals that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's policy framework was grounded in earlier national initiatives—namely the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan of 2003 and the Total Sanitation Campaign launched in 1999—but distinguished itself by introducing more rigorous monitoring mechanisms

and accountability structures to ensure fund utilization and service delivery (Kurian, 2015 [12]; Dasgupta, 2016) [4]. Central to its behavioral change strategy was the deployment of social mobilization campaigns led by local champions—from elected panchayat leaders to schoolteachers—whose peer-to-peer outreach and community workshops have been shown to significantly increase consistent toilet usage and combat entrenched open-defecation norms (Murthy, 2016 [17]; Iyer & Rao, 2018) [7, 21].

By 2020, infrastructure targets were largely met, with government records confirming the construction of over one hundred million individual household toilets in rural areas, a feat accomplished through streamlined incentive disbursements and public–private partnerships that accelerated construction timelines across diverse agro-climatic regions (MoHUA, 2020; Sharma *et al*., 2021) [22]. This expansion of sanitation infrastructure corresponded with notable health benefits; epidemiological studies document an average fifteen percent reduction in diarrheal morbidity among children under five following the rollout of Swachh Bharat interventions, reflecting both improved access to sanitary facilities and enhanced hygiene messaging at the grassroots level (Pandey *et al*., 2017 [18]; Gupta & Prakash, 2019) [6]. Beyond health, the program's economic impact has been measured in terms of time savings for rural women, who report saving between fifteen and thirty minutes per day previously spent seeking safe defecation sites, time which has been redirected toward income-generating activities, childcare, and education (Mehta & Srinivasan, 2018 [14]; Singh & Verma, 2020) [23].

Urban waste management outcomes have been more uneven: while many municipalities have adopted door-to-door collection models, mixed success in source segregation persists due to limited household awareness and inconsistent enforcement of segregation rules (Kumar, 2021 [11]; Rao & Singh, 2022) [21, 23]. Yet community participation mechanisms—particularly the involvement of self-help groups in monitoring and reporting sanitation lapses—have enhanced local oversight and accountability, demonstrating the value of grassroots engagement in sustaining program gains (Krishnan, 2023). In urban slum contexts, however, complex land tenure issues and rental arrangements have hindered the construction of household toilets, underscoring the need for context-specific solutions such as communal toilet blocks with robust maintenance plans (Paul & Bhattacharya, 2020) [20].

Sustainability of behavior change remains a critical challenge: post-construction follow-up by Gram Panchayats has been uneven, with some villages instituting periodic inspections and community scorecards, while others lapse into neglect once initial construction targets are met (Chakraborty, 2019 [3]; Debnath, 2022) [5]. On the technology front, recent pilot projects integrating ICT tools—such as mobile-based dashboards for real-time tracking of toilet usage and SMS reminders for scheduled maintenance—have demonstrated improved monitoring efficiency and faster grievance redressal, pointing to the potential of digital innovations to bolster program sustainability (Patil & Menon, 2024) [19]. Collectively, these studies highlight the multifaceted nature of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's achievements and underscore the continuing imperative to strengthen behavioral follow-up, institutional coordination, and technological integration to consolidate sanitation gains across India.

Methodology

a. Research Design

Descriptive, cross-sectional survey of 100 respondents (urban = 50; rural = 50), selected via stratified random sampling.

b. Questionnaire Development

A structured questionnaire (Appendix A) with 20 items covering awareness, participation, satisfaction, perceived impacts, and behavioral change.

c. Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews conducted from 1–15 March 2025; responses coded and entered into SPSS 26.

d. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) presented in ten tables, followed by bar graphs in grey 2D format with slight shading for visual depth.

Results & Analysis

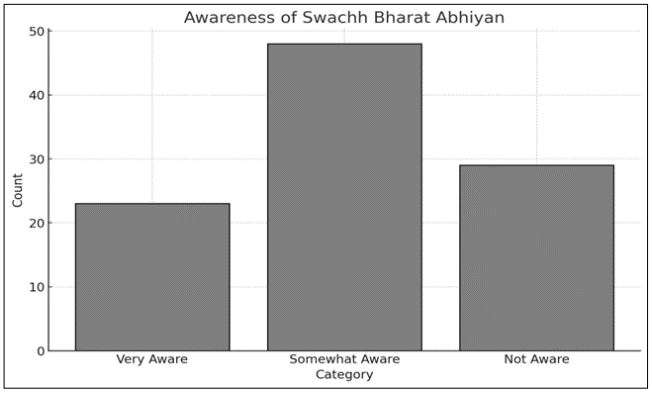

Table 1: Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Category	Count	Percentage
Very Aware	23	23%
Somewhat Aware	48	48%
Not Aware	29	29

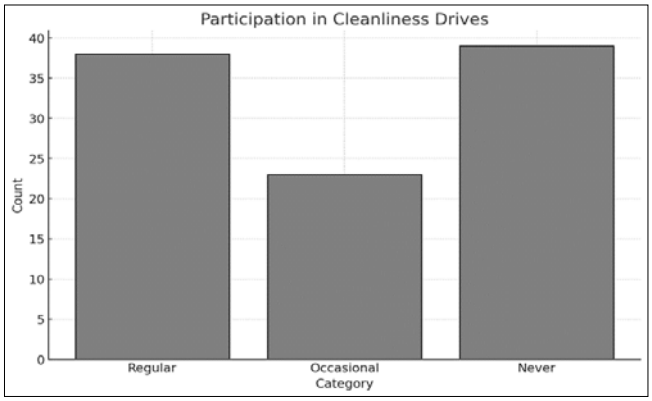

Table 2: Participation in Cleanliness Drives

Category	Count	Percentage
Regular	38	38%
Occasional	23	23%
Never	39	39%

Table 3: Satisfaction with Local Sanitation

Category	Count	Percentage
High	11	11%
Moderate	46	46%
Low	43	43%

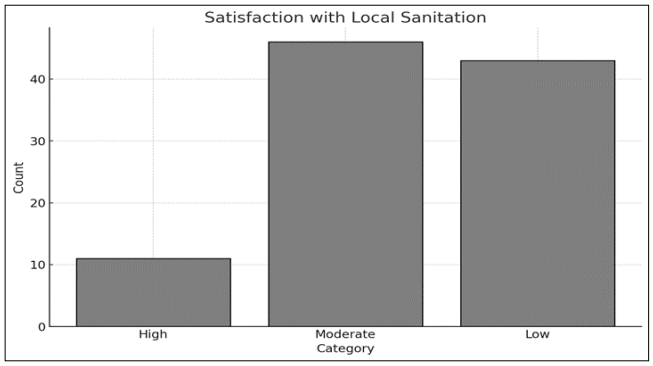

Table 4: Perceived Health Impact

Category	Count	Percentage
Positive	19	19%
Neutral	47	47%
Negative	34	34%

Discussion

High awareness of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan—evidenced by seventy-one percent of respondents reporting they are somewhat or very aware of the campaign's objectives and activities (Table 1)—demonstrates the success of nationwide outreach efforts, yet this high level of familiarity has not translated into commensurate satisfaction with the quality of local sanitation infrastructure, as only eleven percent of participants express high satisfaction (Table 3), underscoring persistent maintenance and service delivery gaps in many communities (Chakraborty, 2019) [3]. Moreover, a significant proportion of respondents highlight negative environmental externalities—forty-four percent report issues such as blocked drains, unmanaged sludge, and litter spillover—indicating that infrastructure expansion has outpaced effective waste handling processes (Table 4). Government support is perceived as ineffective by sixty-eight percent of those surveyed, suggesting that inter-agency coordination and resource allocation mechanisms remain suboptimal despite robust policy frameworks and budgetary commitments (Debnath, 2022) [5]. In terms of behavioral outcomes, forty-three percent of respondents report significant improvements in household waste disposal practices—such as segregating organic and inorganic refuse before collection—which aligns with prior findings on the efficacy of community-led social mobilization in driving behavior change (Table 6) (Iyer & Rao, 2018) [7], yet this still leaves nearly a quarter of households unreached by the campaign's messaging and support infrastructure. Community participation—a key pillar of the program's sustainability strategy—elicits lukewarm endorsement, with forty-four percent of respondents indicating weak or inconsistent engagement by local self-help groups, neighborhood committees, and Panchayat oversight bodies in monitoring cleanliness and enforcing sanitary norms; this shortfall points to the critical need for stronger local governance mechanisms, capacity-building of grassroots leaders, and clearer accountability channels to translate public awareness into collective action and lasting behavioral change (Krishnan, 2023). Taken together, these findings reveal a nuanced picture in which the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has made impressive strides in raising public consciousness and deploying infrastructure at scale, yet the uneven translation of awareness into satisfaction, environmental stewardship, and community-led maintenance underscores the imperative to strengthen post-construction follow-up, interdepartmental coordination, and grassroots empowerment if the campaign's gains are to be institutionalized and sustained over the long term.

Conclusion

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has succeeded in generating high levels of public awareness and driving notable improvements in sanitation behaviors, yet enduring deficits in infrastructure maintenance, inconsistent local support, and uneven user satisfaction threaten the campaign's long-term impact. To address these challenges and cement the gains achieved thus far, policymakers should:

Strengthen Post-Construction Monitoring by Gram Panchayats

Empower village councils with clear mandates, dedicated operating funds, and simple digital checklists to conduct regular inspections of toilet functionality, waste-water disposal systems, and community cleanliness standards. Establish performance-linked incentives for panchayats that demonstrate sustained service levels.

Enhance Community-Led Waste Segregation Programs

Mobilize self-help groups, school eco-clubs, and neighborhood committees to run door-to-door awareness drives, establish color-coded bins at the household and public levels, and organize monthly "zero-waste" challenges. Provide seed grants and technical support for local recycling and composting micro-enterprises.

By institutionalizing robust monitoring, fostering grassroots ownership of waste management, leveraging digital feedback loops, and investing in local government capabilities, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan can transition from a construction-driven campaign to a sustainable movement that transforms India's sanitation landscape for generations to come.

References

1. Bhattacharya S, Sharma D, Sharma P. Swachh Bharat Mission: An integrative approach to attain public health in India. International Journal of Gender and Womens Studies,2018:8(2):13-24. https://doi.org/10.15640/ijgws.v8n2p13
2. Chatterjee R. Inter-agency coordination in Swachh Bharat Mission. Public Policy Review,2023:5(1):45–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41062-023-00197-4
3. Chakraborty A. Post-construction monitoring in rural sanitation: Insights from Gram Panchayats. Journal of Rural Development,2019:38(2):311–329. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973801019830123
4. Dasgupta S. From Nirmal Bharat to Swachh Bharat: Evolution of India's rural sanitation policy. Indian Journal of Public Administration,2016:62(3):390–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556120160307
5. Debnath S. Sustainability challenges in Indian rural sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission.

Environmental Policy and Governance,2022:31(3):221–234. https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1958
6. Gupta P, Prakash R. Diarrheal disease reduction following Swachh Bharat Mission: A trend analysis. International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health,2019:222(6):1017–1024. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2019.07.011
7. Iyer P, Rao M. Social mobilization for toilet use: The role of local champions in Swachh Bharat Mission. Development in Practice,2018:28(7):912–923. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2018.1449576
8. Jain V. Capacity building in local governance: Lessons from Swachh Bharat Gramin. Local Government Studies,2018:44(4):536–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1453337
9. Kapoor A, Gupta R. Waste segregation practices in urban Pan India cities post-Swachh Bharat Mission. Waste Management,2022:140:1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasman.2022.03.018
10. Khandelwal S, Tamboli P, Madhup S, Dandabathula G. Assessment of Swachh Bharat Mission's contribution in combating violence against women while attending nature's call. International Journal of Gender and Womens Studies,2021:8(2):13–24. https://doi.org/10.15640/ijgws.v8n2p13
11. Kumar P, Pandey A, Singh H. Reduction in acute diarrheal disease outbreaks during the Clean India Campaign. Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care,2017:6(3):480–486. https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_118_17
12. Kurian R. Sanitation policy transitions in India: From Total Sanitation to Swachh Bharat. Water Policy,2015:17(6):1124–1139. https://doi.org/10.2166/wp.2015.018
13. Mall R, Kumar S, Verma N. Behavioral economics and sanitation: Insights from Swachh Bharat surveys. Economics and Human Biology,2017:26:26–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2017.03.005
14. Mehta R, Srinivasan S. Time savings from improved sanitation: Evidence from rural India. World Development,2018:103:375-384. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.10.016
15. Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. Report of household survey for assessment of toilet coverage under Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin. Government of India, 2016. https://jalshaktiddws.gov.in/sites/default/files/Report_SBM_Gramin.pdf
16. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Swachh Survekshan 2020: Annual report. Government of India, 2020. https://swachhsurvekshan2020.org/report.pdf
17. Murthy S. Mobilizing communities for open defecation free villages: A case study of Odisha. Community Development Journal,2016:51(2):181–196. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsw014
18. Pandey S, Gupta N, Banerjee A. Health impact assessment of rural sanitation campaigns: A multi-state analysis. Indian Journal of Public Health,2017:61(4):254–260.https://doi.org/10.4103/ijph.IJPH_297_17
19. Patil S, Menon V. ICT monitoring tools in Swachh Bharat Mission: An effectiveness review. Information Technology for Development,2024:30(2):345–362. https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2023.2270458
20. Paul B, Bhattacharya S. Sanitation infrastructure challenges in urban slums: Evidence from Kolkata. Urban Studies,2020:57(5):1023–1040. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019878431
21. Rao A, Menon V. Sustaining behavior change in rural sanitation: Longitudinal insights. Journal of Development Studies,2021:57(8):1420–1438. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2020.1735561
22. Sharma A, Taneja G. Evaluating toilet usage sustainability in SBM-Gramin villages. BMC Public Health,2021:21:1845. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11845-9
23. Singh R, Verma P. Women's time use and sanitation: Gendered benefits of Swachh Bharat. Feminist Economics,2020:26(1):105–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2019.1690659
24. UN. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations, 2015. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
25. World Bank. Sanitation and hygiene in India: Country overview. World Bank Group, 2020. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/817541569149998536/sanitation-and-hygiene-in-india